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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF ELECTION CAMPAIGN STATUS WITH U.S. NGO'S

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: POL and USAID met December 6 with IFES, NDI, and IRI to assess the state of the electoral campaign. There was general agreement that the mechanics of the process are well underway (the exception, for security reasons, being Anbar province; see septel). An exciting development is the emergence of what looks like a real campaign, with grassroots outreach and media advertising and debates. The fierce competition to become part of the new government has its downsides, however. While the January elections and October referendum were dominated by concerns about the terrorist threat, this campaign has witnessed an apparent increase in 1) the use of intimidation and violence among political rivals, and 2) acts of bias -- and, as importantly, perceptions thereof -- by selected institutions of the state such as provincial governments and police. Yet the experts concurred that the election-related violence that is occurring in Iraq is typical of post-conflict transitional elections, and is not unique to Iraq.

2. (C) Summary con'td: There is genuine anxiety among Iraq's political class about the prospect of ballot-stuffing on election day, and an apprehension that temporary local IECI employees in the provinces will be vulnerable to threats or corruption. In an effort to preclude such fraud, a total of 81,000 domestic observers have acquired accreditation from the IECI, including Iraq's Election Information Network (EIN), which was trained by NDI and the EU and has mobilized 15,000 observers. In addition, political parties have designated more than 182,000 accredited party "agents" to observe at polling locations. The IECI has undertaken a series of steps to address these concerns, including pre- and post-election audits in high risk areas and expanded support to its complaint mechanism. Significant challenges notwithstanding, the election campaign is moving forward. End Summary.

3. (C) International and local staff from IECI (including the IECI Election Violence, Education and Resolution, or EVER, Project), NDI and IRI met with POL and USAID officers December 6 to exchange information and assess the state of Iraq's election campaign. The group discussed the mechanics of the election, including Out-of-Country voting (OCV) and monitoring, and reviewed activities that threatened to undermine or disrupt the electoral process. Below is a summary of the discussion.

Mechanics

4. (C) In large part due to the experience accrued in the previous two elections, logistical elements such as identifying polling locations, arranging movement of supplies, and training of staff are in hand. After a slow start, planning for OCV in 15 countries is well underway, although communications between the IECI and other countries is poor. IMIE is prepared to operate at OCV sites. (Note: The IECI has accredited 778 international observers. The vast majority is drawn from the international community currently present in Iraq.)

Domestic Observers

5. (C) With significant assistance from NDI, the Iraqi NGO EIN has developed a "triple-check" observer network for each polling center. The first tranche of observers will be from local residents near each polling center. The second tranche of observers will be from a neighboring province. The third and smallest tranche of observers will be from out of the region (e.g., someone from Mosul traveling to Basra.) Given the logistical problems of transport and hotels, the third tranche will be hosted in the homes of their local counterparts (a practical arrangement that should increase their security, as well). A total of 15,000 observers have been trained by EIN in a cascade arrangement (including 600 national team leaders and a "core" NGO in each province). In addition to EIN, there are some 50 other Iraqi observer groups, although few have EIN's national reach. The IECI has accredited a total of more than 79,000 domestic observers.

6. (C) NDI and IRI have also trained several thousand "party agents" (in a train-the-trainers scheme), who will be present at polling centers to observe the process. The IECI has

accredited more than 182,000 party agents. It is not clear whether this large number of party observers will actually turn out on election day, although the effort to obtain accreditation by so many reflects in part concern among the political parties about potential fraud.

Threats to the Process

17. (C) Many of the international experts were involved in the January elections and October referendum. One difference in this campaign, they said, is the apparent increase in violence among political rivals, which has increased commensurate with the expansion of campaign activity. The IFES EVER program (Election Violence Education and Resolution) cautioned, however, that until recently most of the electoral violence has been committed by insurgents. IFES EVER expects the period ranging from three to five days before the election and the day after to be the most violent.

18. (C) Types of election violence reported by the group include the following: vandalism of campaign materials; intimidation; death threats; assassination; small arms fire; and executions. Reported examples of inter-party violence include an alleged KDP attack against the offices of the Kurdish Islamic Party (KIP) and Mahdi militia assassination of Badr officials. One meeting participant personally knew of three incidents where a candidate's family members were kidnapped to force his withdrawal from the campaign. (NOTE: One of these cases involves the abduction of the brother of former Governor of Najaf Adnan al-Zurfi.) The media has publicized the murderous attacks against members of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, the Iraqi Islamic Party, and the Allawi List. There is also the assumption that the main Kurdish parties are prohibiting other parties from traveling to campaign in Kurdish areas, and that the main Shia parties are using their militias to intimidate other parties from campaigning.

19. (C) A second troubling phenomenon of this campaign is the actual or apparent involvement of official organizations of the state in intimidation activities. Examples include reports of police tearing down campaign banners and posters, failing to respond to attacks against political activists, and ordering political activists to cease campaigning. There is a widespread rumor that the Education Minister, who represents SCIRI, has replaced the school administrators in the south to ensure that those teachers who serve as local IECI staff support the agenda of the UIA slate. There is also the belief that some governors and provincial councils are complicit in efforts to thwart the visibility and campaigns of political opponents.

110. (C) Another factor is the perception that the IECI is biased or ineffective. At a national level, there have been complaints that the IECI has failed to enforce its own regulations or impose sanctions, e.g. in cases involving the misuse of religious symbols in the election campaign. The IECI has also been criticized for not responding to complaints in a timely manner. During the referendum, there were anecdotal reports that local IECI poll workers permitted such inappropriate practices as allowing the head of a tribe to vote for his entire tribe, the head of a household to vote for his entire family, and armed security guards to accompany notable persons into polling stations.

Fears about Fraud

11. (C) The most widely held concern is the fear that ballot-stuffing will take place once the polls close at 1700. Although independent observers and party agents are authorized to stay during the ballot count, this practice is not well understood throughout the country. A complicating factor is the curfew; observers who are permitted to stay may well be stuck at the polling centers for the entire night. There are also rumors that the large coalitions are seeking to bribe or intimidate local poll workers.

Preemptive Steps

112. (C) During the January 2005 elections and October 2005 referendum, the IECI gained significant experience in election administration. Existing measures are in place to combat electoral fraud, including procedural measures, tally center validation, observation, and a complaints process. To respond to the concerns specific to this campaign, the IECI is planning a series of pre- and post-election audits throughout the country, including areas with a suspect track record. The purpose of the IECI audits is to act as a deterrent by signaling to the provinces that the IECI "is watching." In response to recent criticism by political parties, the commission has increased the resources dedicated to its complaint mechanism. Other measures undertaken by the IECI include the introduction of field monitors, an emphasis

on anti-corruption, and outreach efforts and public affairs programs.

COMMENT

113. (C) One meeting participant cautioned that the reported problems constitute but the tip of the iceberg. We assume this is the case in many instances. At the same time we assume other reported problems spring from partisan agendas or Iraq's active political rumor mill. Post will continue to encourage the IECI to meet the challenge of identifying which complaints are legitimate, take meaningful action in such cases, and to publicize its readiness to do so. We will also seek to encourage political actors to understand that the integrity of the election is in the interests of Iraq and all who aspire to govern this country.

KHALILZAD